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Contemporary World of Myth in Githa Hariharan's Novel "When Dreams Travel"

Abstract: The novel *When Dreams Travel* obviously shows that women by nature are not prone to move freely and the absence of mobility on the part of a woman is compensated by her skill of articulation which is seen on her narration and description which grab all the attention of the listener to her and finally force man to listen to her dictation. Shahrzad's story is a proven truth that imagination and dreams have the power to emancipate anyone and everyone. *When Dreams Travel* is a story about storytelling, which ventures the power to create in one's mind over mundane facts of existence. Githa Hariharan has carefully brought out the subtext of agony and cruelty which lies submerged in the colourful text of adventure and fantasy, and has tried to sensitize the tale. Her stories are myths, with a string of self-contained tales within the frame of another story. The silent and absented women in the original story of *The Thousand and One Nights* come to surface here. Shahrzad's sister, their mother, the mother of

Shaharyar, the slave girls and the maids in the palace and Shahrzad herself who were silenced after *The Thousand and One Nights*, speak in Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*, and tell their tale. The need and the longing to voice out one's own cause, and the need for satisfying the artist's creative urge are conveyed in the novel.

Myths appearing in literature may be distinct from true myths, but still they recollect the fragments of a pragmatic assembly and they can be easily drawn to a legendary substance. Githa Hariharan enters the web of life in order to extricate the facts and predicament of reality through her women characters. The myths offer the artist a theme which sounds a basic subject and thus makes it possible to return to the world-wide audience. While using myth, as a raw material Githa Hariharan is capable of transferring her fictional world into the prominence of a contemporary myth. She creates a new dimension and an advanced dialectics of myths.

Roland Barthes states,

“A myth is a type of speech, so that everything can be myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myths are stories drawn from a society's history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness with all the complexities and contradictions that consciousness may contain.”

The novel *When Dreams Travel* exhibits women's issues from feminine panorama with the help of recreated mythic and dreamy environment. It portrays the suffering of women in the mythical background and clarifies how the women are fermented and what the consequences are when they are exploited by the society which is male-dominating. Like, *The Thousand Faces of Night* the novel depicts the marginalized status of women. But the approach of the novelist is totally different from that narrative technique and mythical

environment is created and handled brilliantly by the women characters in *When Dreams Travel*.

When Dreams Travel: A modernized myth refers to modern / contemporary scenario of social ambience with particular citation to women's position and prominence in society, and the problems they face while insisting their identity, hardships they undergo while enunciating their feelings. Githa Hariharan uses myths to point out bleak and vicious face of patriarchal rules in society. In *When Dreams Travel*, many times Githa Hariharan is ironical in her verbalization revealing out prejudiced treatment of men towards women. Mystery and suspense are prominent and it foregrounds the feminist problems in the novel. The fantastic and dream like elements are merged with the acute suffering of women in the society. The novelist creates magical myth and fantasy through her well-knit stories told by Dunyazad and Shahrzad. The stories have unreal setting but it portrays the stark and hideous reality of the society.

Githa Hariharan's novel *When Dreams Travel*, takes up the story from the point where *The Arabian Nights* is seen at the background. And, it is here that the author exhorts what could have possibly happened to the lead characters if they have broken the silence as revealed. The story is a fusion by many essential features: of hopes; of despair; of remembrance; of identity search and identity crisis; of freedom; of life and death and more. The novel flows placidly and tosses between the 'dreams' with a narrative, and recalling memories which includes the theme of typical desires, death and other negativities.

As the three women, Shahrzad, who is the storyteller too; Dunyazad and Dilshad wait on Sultan Shahryar's endless fixation for numerous things like sex, stories, power, love, death and memory, Githa Hariharan lets herself indulge in a free fall of the narrative which is rich and of multiple colours. The preceding sharp-edged patriarchal power will also be felt

while reading the story. Dunyazad is a middle-aged woman, who is wedded to Sultan Shahryar's brother, Shahzaman. She had lived with him in Samarkand for many years, but now she is a widow. To find out the real story and the reasons behind Shahrzad's death, which was unexpected and sudden, she reaches the palace of Shahryar. The story is set in the fictional city of Shahabad, where Dunyazad assists Prince Umar (Sultan's son) in taking over the throne mentioned as "a new order of things".

When Dreams Travel, is based on a typical 'myth of dream' travelling towards her destination. The author has not only selected a theme of moral values of high intellect evolved in the novel. Githa Hariharan has succeeded in tackling the myth of The Arabian Nights wherein she brings out this answer by revealing the cynicism behind the androcentric myth about harems:

"All kings are collectors ... These valuable items are women of all shapes, colours and sizes. The Kings would propagate the myth – 'The harem breed hungry women, a race of cuckolding subjects?'"(WDT 78).

The novel is mainly about Shahrzad's search for her story. It is the hunt for love and power and the quest for identity is recognised with the journey of mind along times and spaces. Shahrzad, with her courage and determined will, finds her self-identity which is restrained by Shahryar. And at last she also warns her present generation to remain alert to her premonition so that they can accept the dispute when their turn comes. When Dreams Travel, is an apt illustrations of the postmodern meta-fiction that refuses to maintain a clear division between fictional texts and their critical readings. Githa Hariharan has portrayed the different myths in her own style. The treatment of myth is successfully designed and the author has challenged the established system in a bold manner. The myth she used in the novel is based on exploding dynamic ideas in the old form. Her abilities can be very well

illustrated by quoting examples from the novel. What is more important is to understand her spirit. According to Sunita Sinha:

“Githa Hariharan’s greatest achievement in terms of feminist intervention is to reconstruct a powerful myth. Both the canonised version and this rewriting prove that Shahrzad’s myth lives on, as one of the narratives praising women’s intelligence” (Sinha 111)

In Githa Hariharan’s novels, there is always a remedy given to myth and reality. Like her earlier works, the present work is also based on the myths of dreams; when *Dreams Travel*, is based on an interesting myth of *The Arabian Nights*. Rahul Chaturvedi has rightly observed:

“The novel is a tale of fantasy and fiction and reveals in gothic, magic, jinni’s, dungeons and mythic. On the surface, it seems to have no foothold in reality, but produces, at the deeper level, politics, gender differences, and the abuse of power.” (Chaturvedi 155).

The myth in *When Dreams Travel*, recalls and brighten the old story of *The Arabian Nights* with a new outlook. Githa Hariharan’s dreams relate the blending of the past, present and future. The repeated backward and forward movement lends a pictorial view of the locations and occurrences. The fabled past overlaps with the present giving way to fantasy and magic realism.

When Dreams Travel, is presented in two parts. Part one- entitled “Travellers”- is a rewriting of the original frame story of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the plot of which is outlined in an opening section entitled “In the Embrace of Darkness”. First two sections recast the myth of Shaharyar and Shaharzad. Part two – titled “Virgins, Martyrs and others”- has a brief introduction that is sub-headed as “A Dream, A Mirror,” which is followed by seven pairs of short stories alternately narrated by Dunyazad (Shahrazad’s sister), and Dilshad (Dunyazad’s lover).

The travelling of women's dreams is itself a rationale myth. Githa Hariharan has developed this myth in a charismatic mode. The social realities are very much impartial and they do not exaggerate facts. She believes in precise, compressed and fair understanding of facts. Githa Hariharan's instant novel is dramatic, effectual and elucidated the facts of social drama.

Githa Hariharan's novel *When Dreams Travel*, as critics praised, has all the elements that confer upon it the place in the leading rank in the genre of myths. On the back cover of the novel it is stated:

“With its sharp and lively blend of past and presents its skilful reworking of the historical tradition, and its evocative language, *When Dreams Travel*, has all the significance of modern myth”.

The novel concludes with a vision of Shahrzad- now an old woman- which brings past- present- future together, blending in one another, “a circle with no beginning or end” (WDT: 276). *When Dreams Travel*, undoubtedly is the transparent medium of self-expression. Thus, the novel *When Dreams Travel*, is a modern myth,” a symbolic projection of women's hopes of liberty, values and aspiration” of women.

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